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C O N F I D E N T I A L MONROVIA 000100

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DEPT FOR DS/IP/AF AND AF/W  
LAGOS ALSO FOR DEA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/01/2018

TAGS: SNAR PRGOV ASEC LI

SUBJECT: DRUG SMUGGLING VESSEL BROUGHT TO MONROVIA

Classified By: Ambassador Donald E. Booth for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) On January 29, French navy vessel Tonnerre intercepted and boarded Liberian flagged merchant vessel Blue Atlantic in international waters approximately 500 kilometers south of Liberia. The French boarding party found the merchant vessel carried 2.4 tons of cocaine carried in 92 barrels. The investigation, while still ongoing, had determined the ultimate destination of the vessel was not Liberia.

¶2. (SBU) On the evening of January 31, Tonnerre escorted the Blue Atlantic into the Freeport of Monrovia. Liberian Minister of National Security led an interagency security team, along with a visiting French Ministry of Foreign Affairs official to oversee the inventory of seized narcotics, documents, and the arrest of the nine Ghanaian crew members.

¶3. (SBU) On February 1, the French handed over custody of the ship, narcotics, and crew to the Liberian Ministry of National Security. Nearly all Liberian security services, United Nations officials, Embassy personnel and local press observed the initial destruction of the narcotics. The packets of cocaine were being cut and destroyed through immersion in water. The Liberian Ministry of Justice was in charge of the Liberian coordination effort consisting of representatives from the Liberian Ministry of National Security, Liberian Drug Enforcement Agency, Liberian National Security Agency, Liberian Inspector General, Liberian National Police, and Liberian Seaport Police. The United Nations Police Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner as well as members of the UN Nepalese, Ghanaian and Nigerian formed police units and UN military personnel are on hand for additional security.

¶4. (C) Comment: It appears the French chose to bring the merchant vessel to Monrovia because it bore a Liberian flag, and perhaps because of the UN presence. However, the Liberians appeared to those of us observing the operation to be incapable of responding to the event, and given the manner the Liberians have chosen to dispose of the cocaine, there is no way to know if all the cocaine will be disposed of properly.

Booth